

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Muscle relaxation can be helpful in managing anxiety and coping with negative feelings. When we are anxious it is difficult to think our way out of our anxious state, thus focusing on various aspects within our bodies can help to calm the body and in turn calm the mind and lower anxiety. Have you ever noticed that when you are anxious, your body can become more tense? This technique works very well with paced breathing as you want to focus on your even, slow breaths as you tense and relax your muscles. There are many different ways to utilize this skill and can be done in a full body relaxation or even targeted muscle group relaxation.

### Paired Muscle Relaxation

- Start by being in a quiet space to help avoid distractions. Sit in a comfortable position that allows you to be relaxed
- Start by taking slow, deep breathes; focusing on your breaths and how the sensation feels in your body
- You will then focus on each part of your body and slowly bring tension (if painful skip that area as this should not cause cramping or pain) into that muscle group (see list below) and hold that tension as you in breathe in for 5-6 seconds and then as you breathe out you will slowly relax the tension. Allow yourself you notice the changes in sensations for 10 to 15 seconds before moving onto the next muscle.
  - Hands – make fists with both hands
  - Arms- make fists and bend both arms to touch shoulders
  - Neck and shoulders- pull your shoulders up towards your ears
  - Forehead- raise your eyebrows as high as you can
  - Eyes- squeeze your eyes tightly shut
  - Mouth- press your lips together tightly
  - Back- squeeze your shoulder blades together
  - Chest- take a deep breath and briefly hold (like filling a balloon)
  - Stomach- pull in your belly button, tightening your stomach muscles
  - Thighs and buttocks- tighten your butt and upper thigh muscles
  - Lower leg- straighten your legs and point your toes up towards your knees
  - Toes- curl your toes downward
  - Return to any muscle groups that may still be tense, and repeat

Practicing this skill even when not feeling tense, or anxious can allow for you to learn to let go of physical stress.